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FM AMEMBASSY SUVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3460
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1380
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 0975
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1161
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000506

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 11/20:

REF: A. SUVA 502
[1](#)B. SUVA 499
[1](#)C. USDAO SUVA 152253Z NOV 06

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama informed the media over the weekend that he has no intention of meeting with Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) mediators or with PM Qarase (Ref A) until the PM accepts all the RFMF's demands. Bainimarama said that, if there has been no "clean up" of the Qarase Government by early December, the RFMF has "alternative plans" but not a coup. In Parliament, a State Minister labeled Bainimarama a terrorist and reported that the RFMF has compiled a list for an "alternative Cabinet." Bainimarama intends a private visit to New Zealand for the next week, the GNZ permitting. We comment that both Bainimarama and Qarase appear to be scrambling to salvage their positions, suggesting neither is over-confident about how events are transpiring. One hopes that cool heads will prevail, but many in Fiji remain very worried about a coup. End summary.

Bainimarama insists on "clean up" by December

[1](#)2. (U) We understand RFMF Commander Bainimarama met with President Iloilo on Monday, Nov. 20. We are seeking a readout. Bainimarama has made clear that he has no intention of meeting with PM Qarase or the GCC mediators, at least not until PM Qarase meets all of the RFMF's "non-negotiable" demands (Ref B). In a media interview on Nov. 19, Bainimarama said the RFMF sees no need for a coup, but it will insist on a "clean up" of the Qarase-led government by sometime in early December, after school exams end. (Note: Fiji schools end their year on Dec. 1.) Asked what "clean up" means, Bainimarama reportedly said that if the Government doesn't agree to clean itself up, the RFMF has "alternative plans." He reportedly told the media the military would let the nation know of its intentions well in advance.

Minister calls Bainimarama a terrorist

[1](#)3. (U) In a speech to Parliament on Nov. 17, State Minister Ted Young described Bainimarama and his senior RFMF officers as "terrorists" using intimidation for political purposes and threatening democracy. He advised military personnel not to be gullible, not to follow any orders that they feel are unlawful. Young criticized the Fiji Labor Party (FLP) for silence on the issue, and he claimed that reliable sources had told him an RFMF list for an "alternative Cabinet" includes FLP Leader Chaudhry's name. Young said Bainimarama's head "should be cut off at the neck." Bainimarama in turn called for Young to come and try to cut

off his head.

Budget maneuvering continues

14. (U) Debate on Fiji's 2007 budget continues until the vote on Wed., Nov. 22. We have heard reliably that PM Qarase intends to have key FLP members of the multi-party Cabinet overseas on the day of the vote to keep them from having to formalize their support of the budget, which would contravene the FLP's dictate to be in opposition. FLP President Koroi has said such a tactic will not save the Cabinet members. However, we hear the PM's office has legal advice that precedent makes clear being abroad on official business is a valid excuse. If the FLP expels Cabinet members, a judicial challenge is expected.

A week in New Zealand?

15. (C) Bainimarama intends to depart Tuesday, Nov. 21, to New Zealand for about a week to visit his daughter and granddaughter. We hear New Zealand PM Clark is personally considering whether to allow the visit to proceed. Some advisors are arguing that, given the PM's firm public remarks about Bainimarama's inappropriate behavior, to permit the visit would make the NZ Government appear inconsistent. Others are arguing that it is a private visit and should proceed.

Comment

16. (C) It appears to us that both Bainimarama and Qarase are playing the sorts of cards one plays when unsure of one's strength. Bainimarama's words sound firm, but if he really was sure of his forces and was intending a coup, why would he

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be continually moving his line in the sand farther down the beach? If he really does not intend a coup but is intent on piling on pressure to drive reform, his latest demands, particularly to remove the Police Commissioner and to drop all police investigations aimed at the RFMF leadership, seem hardly intended to achieve real progress. In fact, the demand about dropping investigations could appear the effort of a desperate man who has put himself in a sedition box with no happy way out. Several savvy Indian businessmen-politicians in Fiji's West told our DCM today that they are more worried than they have ever been before. They figure the "drop the investigations" and "fire the Commissioner" demands have crossed the line and indicate a coup is coming.

17. (C) Qarase has not succeeded to date in invoking the constitutional process, via the President, to evict Bainimarama. His effort to bring criminal indictments against the RFMF senior leadership leaves open the question of who can enforce those indictments if the RFMF stands by its leaders. With such uncertainty, Qarase seems to be playing the Fijian-race card. He has invoked the GCC, and one presumes his office encouraged State Minister Young's speech. Both moves surely are aimed at spurring the large majority of Fijians who back Qarase to work on their friends in the RFMF to resist the Commander.

18. (C) One has to wonder just what Bainimarama contemplates as an "alternative plan" that is not a coup but that forces PM Qarase and his Government to clean up or leave office? In a conversation last week with the Embassy DATT (Ref C), Bainimarama seemed to suggest the RFMF might shut down Parliament and keep it from functioning. Surely that action to any reasonable person would be characterized as a coup. We are getting a distinct impression that the RFMF leadership went down its present road without truly thinking through the risks and consequences. One hopes for cool heads to prevail; but many in Fiji, like the businessmen in the West, remain very worried.

DINGER